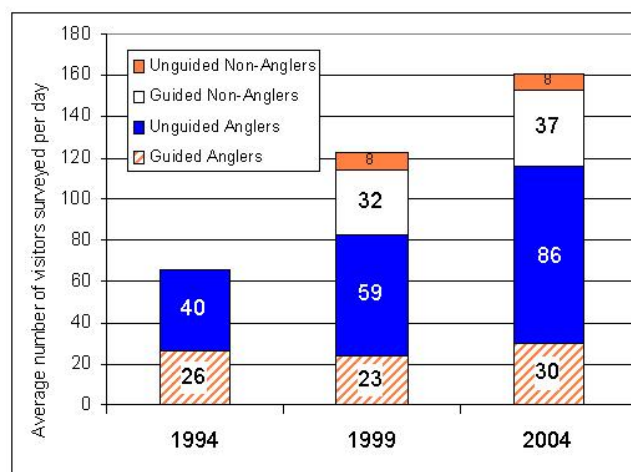


# Heading out to wet a line on the Upper Kenai River? You're not alone

by Julie Laker



*Kenai River Visitation 2005.*

The world-class fishing and scenic boating opportunities on the upper Kenai are no longer a secret. Crowds at the confluence of the Russian and Kenai rivers have long been the norm, as anglers battle elbow to eyeball for sockeye. And any fishing guide will tell you the upper Kenai is getting more crowded in other areas too, as more people try their luck chasing rainbows and Dolly Varden, as well as salmon.

If you boated on the Upper Kenai last summer, perhaps you met one of the Fish & Wildlife Service survey technicians at Jim's Landing—someone recording which boats were guided, whether visitors were fishing (and for what) and which boats continued into the Kenai River Canyon. Last summer's surveys were the latest in a series of visitor interviews at Jim's Landing. The objective of these surveys was not to count every boat on the water but to develop an index to reveal trends over the years. Information collected in 1994, 1999, and 2004 shows an increase in the numbers of boaters on the Upper Kenai River.

Kenai River Visitations 2005 in 31 survey days last summer, 6,473 visitors in 1,723 boats were recorded. Most of these visitors (66%) were anglers. Guided and unguided visitors were evenly split, with 51% guided. Of the total, 15% of the visitors entered the Kenai River Canyon. Those who did were generally guided and generally scenic boaters.

Survey technicians also asked boating parties about their residence. Almost half of the parties were Alaska residents (49%), with 9% residing on the Kenai Peninsula and 40% residing elsewhere in the state. Non-residents constituted 22% of parties. Eighteen percent of the boats were filled with visitors hailing from multiple locations; most of these were a mix of non-local Alaska residents and non-residents. The residence of the remaining 11% was unknown; most of these boats floated past Jim's Landing into Kenai River Canyon so they could not be interviewed.

The average number of visitors surveyed per day on the Upper Kenai River has increased over the last ten years. The most dramatic increase has been observed with unguided anglers, which have more than doubled since 1994. Scenic boaters were not recorded during the 1994 survey, but have increased in the last 5 years. The total number of visitors surveyed per day on the Upper Kenai increased from an average of 122 in 1999, to 161 in 2004. Future management plans for the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge will take these numbers into consideration.

So if you're planning to fish or float the Upper Kenai, you are in for a memorable experience—with spectacular scenery, beautiful fish, and plenty of company.

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